

CONTEXT CORNER I: GYPSIES, FARMERS, GOVERNESSES, AND ORPHANS: CLASS STATUS IN *EMMA*

The Orphan

3 meanings:

- Child with no living parents
- Child with one living parent
- Child with two living parents in the custody of a third party

Statistics:

- Families: 20-30% “experienced orphaning”
- Individuals under 21: 50% chance of being orphaned

Caretaking Situation Depended on Class:

- Upper class orphan → legal guardian
- Middle class orphan → relative
- Lower class orphan → service or apprenticeship, charity hospital, or “parish Poor Law guardians”

❖ See Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature*, pp. 4-5 and 47-53.

The “Illegitimate” Orphan

- Many children born out of wedlock in the 18th century
- Under the law: *filius nullius* or “a son of nobody”
- Cultural attitudes **varied based on class** and were **connected to property and inheritance** concerns:
 - Upper and lower classes: “casual,” fairly “tolerant”
 - Middle classes: less tolerant but attitude shifting

❖ See Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings*, pp. 1-6 and 166.

The Governess

A “**status symbol**” (esp. for the rising middle class) (Martin 3)

• **Occupation for:**

- Orphans
- Spinsters
- Gentlewomen (gentility a requirement)

• **Duties:**

- Teach basic academic subjects
- Teach girls accomplishments (e.g., piano playing, drawing, singing, French)
- Serve as a moral guide and social companion

• **Conditions:**

- Room and board
- Yearly wage: £20—£45
- Long hours
- Unclear position in household (not a servant and not a family member)
- Isolating and lonely
- Job insecurity

❖ See Martin’s “Introduction” to *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen* and Hughes, *A Victorian Governess*.

The Farmer

- Most farmers **rented their land** from large landholders
- Social position, income, and size of farm varied
- **Subject to social criticism:** putting on airs (parlors and pianos), adopting the manners and customs of the upper classes
- No formal education in agriculture

❖ See Hoyle’s “Introduction...” to *The Farmer in England 1650-1980*

Bibliography and Further Reading

The Gypsy

- “[O]bject of fascination” for British culture (Nord 1)
- **Itinerant:**
 - Traveled around rural England
 - Often camped in common areas
- **Occupations:**
 - Hawking goods and services
 - Fortune-telling
 - Entertaining: fairs, festivals, weddings, funerals
- **18th/19th-Century Views:**
 - “Pastoral figure” (Nord 6)
 - The “Other”: racial or ethnic
 - “[O]utcast traveller[.]” (Mayall 6)
 - Lawless, immoral, irreligious, deceitful
- **Subject to persecution and reform efforts**
- ❖ See Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, pp. 1-20 and Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers...*

The Orphan:

- Nixon, Cheryl L. *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and Body*. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011.
- Zunshine, Lisa. *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005.
- König, Eva. *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Vicissitudes of the Eighteenth-Century Subject*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

The Governess:

- Hughes, Kathryn. *The Victorian Governess*. London: Hambledon P, 1993.
- Martin, Joanna. “Introduction.” *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen: The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter*. Ed. Joanna Martin. London: Hambledon P, 1998. 1-75.

The Farmer:

- Hoyle, Richard W. “Introduction: Recovering the Farmer.” *The Farmer in England, 1650-1980*. Ed. Richard W. Hoyle. Farnham Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2013. 1-42.

The Gypsy:

- Mayall, David. *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Gypsies & the British Imagination, 1807-1930*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006